Notes for a Presentation by Paul Heinbecker

Of Laurier University, the Balsillie School of International Affairs, and the Centre for International Governance Innovation

on The United Nations and Global Governance in the 21st Century:

Stakes, Constraints and Perspectives

at L'Université de Québec á Montréal

October 21, 2015

English Version, Check Against Delivery

Introduction/Thesis

Global Governance is being transformed.

Multi-polarity is moving from theory to reality.

Three or four huge economies dominate global business and finance.

Perhaps a score of countries determine the course of international peace and stability.

Moreover, governments no longer govern this world alone.

Major corporations, civil society and organized crime are all also engaged.

The most pressing issues of this complex world, for example, climate change and internet utility, require responses beyond the capacities of even the most powerful governments alone.

For better or worse, no country can claim global hegemony.

In this world, cooperation is more productive than autarky.

The key governance questions we face are not just what needs to be done but also how it can be done and by whom.

Answers to these questions will have to come through the world's multilateral institutions, including foremost the UN.

The answers will also come via mini-lateral groupings such as the G20, from regional and sub-regional organizations and from issue-specific coalitions, as well as other governance innovations.

Global governance in the 21st Century will be more complex than ever before.

This means that Canadian engagement in global governance will be more necessary than ever before if we are to protect our interests and promote our values.

Sitting on the sidelines will be a prescription for irrelevance.

Effective diplomacy to protect and advance our own interests will be crucial.

Global Governance

Innovative global governance will complement, not supplant the UN and the institutions of the Bretton Woods agreement.

In contemplating what needs to be done to improve global governance, it is appropriate to take stock of what has already been done, particularly by member countries working cooperatively through the UN.

By and large, member states of the UN have succeeded in meeting the key goals they set for themselves in San Francisco in 1945.

To refresh fading memories, these goals were

to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, at least world war;

to protect human rights;

to foster universal justice;

and to promote economic and social progress.

To avoid the scourge of war, member states have largely succeeded in stigmatizing aggression.

There has not been an actual war between major powers since the Korean War.

That long period of comparative peace has been partly a result of education and simple human progress,

> partly a consequence of the spread of democracy

> partly an outcome of the integration of the global economy,

> partly a product of the deterrence effect of weapons of mass destruction,

> partly the result of conflict prevention and international norm building through the United Nations,

> And partly the consequence of the 24/7diplomacy in New York of the five permanent members of the Security Council—China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the US.

Through the years, treaties on arms control and disarmament have been negotiated under UN auspices,

> from the pre-eminent nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

> to the nuclear Test Ban Treaty

> to the Land-Mines Treaty

> to the recent Arms Trade Treaty (which the Harper government declined to sign, the only NATO government to have so balked).

As for human rights, a whole corpus of conventions has been concluded,

> from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

> to the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and Economic and Social Rights

> to the Conventions against Genocide,

> against Torture,

> against racial discrimination,

> against discrimination against women,

> and for the rights of children.

These treaties are respected unevenly around the world but over time they are being progressively assimilated into state practice.

To "foster universal justice", the International Court of Justice has quietly over the years rendered landmark judgments and scores of opinions, e.g. on land and maritime boundaries and on the legality of the use of nuclear weapons.

UN member states have also created an extensive criminal justice system, comprising the International Criminal Court and ad hoc UN tribunals.

Despite the dependence of these courts on the cooperation of member countries to deliver alleged perpetrators into their custody, they have managed to administer justice to some of our times' worst human rights abusers.

And last but not least, the UN system can claim a fair share of the credit for the remarkable economic and social progress the world has made in the course of three generations.

For example, the UN and its constituent bodies have concluded 45 treaties on the environment

from the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

to the Montreal Protocol on ozone depletion

to treaties on migratory species and

beyond.

The UN has also passed 13 counter-terrorism treaties.

All told, over 500 multilateral treaties have been concluded under UN auspices on everything from arm scontrol to air traffic control.

The member countries of the UN have, thus, spawned an extensive body of international law, treaties, norms, practices and institutions that govern most facets of interstate relations.

In part because of the UN Charter and the international treaties built upon the charter, the UN has become the world's central operating system,

a kind of motherboard of global governance.

The UN performs its own core functions and at the same time also enables "Apps" to function, both within the ambit of the UN organization—for example, UNICEF—and beyond it, for example NATO.

NATO needs the UN to certify the legitimacy of its acts in order to maintain public support for its operations

Absent the UN and its universal membership and legal framework, smaller, exclusive groups, especially the G7 but also the G20, would be much more controversial and probably correspondingly less effective.

The UN also makes it possible to convene governments for example to establish the Millennium Development Goals and the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals.

 Most fundamental, the UN and its charter provide the rule book for the conduct of international relations,

Almost all states, including G20 states, except possibly the current leadership of Russia, understand and accept the strictures of the Charter

From peacekeeping to peace enforcement and peacebuilding,

> to international criminal justice systems,

> to sustainable development,

> to refugee protection,

> to humanitarian coordination and food relief,

> to democracy and electoral support,

> to human rights conventions,

> to health protection and to managerial accountability and oversight,

the organization has been changing and equipping itself to acquit its increasingly demanding responsibilities.

Multi-lateral cooperation , especially through the UN, remains necessary therefore to the preservation of international peace and the promotion of progress.

The UN is indispensable but not sufficient to good global governance.

<u>Governance Innovation</u>

But mini-lateralism, the cooperative conduct of international affairs by a restricted group of countries, for example the G20, is also important,

as are other innovations such as multi-stakeholder governance,

regional-level cooperation and issue-specific coalitions.

The G20 derives its legitimacy principally from its past success and its future potential.

It has succeeded in addressing the crucial economic and financial crises of 2008 and subsequent years.

And it has put financial and banking reforms, fiscal and monetary policy coordination, and trade imbalances and the like on the international agenda.

Its legitimacy also stems from the fact that its membership accounts for 67

percent of world population, 75 percent of world trade and 85 percent of

global gross economic product.

These factors do not constitute universality, of course.

Importantly, the least developed countries are missing, as are the UN's

middle powers, including some of the very constructive smaller powers

such as Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands and Singapore.

But, groups with restricted membership are nevertheless important,

because consensus is notoriously difficult to achieve in the UN, an

organization of 193 members.

While such restricted membership groups, including the G20, cannot command compliance by others, they can commend their decisions to others, especially to other UN members,

And they can bind themselves if they wish.

When the G20 reaches agreement among its members, a large part of whatever problem it is addressing is on its way to resolution.

Multi-stakeholder engagement is another feature of the evolving international system of governance.

It is characterized by the full participation of non-state stakeholders in governance forums.

One variant of the multi-stakeholder approach to problem-solving was the Ottawa process that engaged civil society and governments to produce the anti-personnel landmines treaty of 1997.

Climate change is a current example of this phenomenon—involving national, sub-national and city governments, university and private sector scientists, energy and transportation companies, wildlife organizations, environmentalists and ordinary citizens.

The solutions need to be acceptable to al but the path to such solutions runs through restricted groupings

Internet governance is a further emerging multi-stakeholder issue.

As with climate change, internet governance entails state and non-state actors working together to develop and maintain rules of behavior for complex systems.

Competing for influence are the major service providers;

   artistic or intellectual content providers;

technology companies like Google, Amazon and eBay;

business and commercial interests who use the internet, including

banks and credit card companies;

development cooperation activists;

the proponents of free speech;

hackers who challenge computer security systems;

law enforcement agencies seeking to protect the public from internet

abuses such as child pornography;

government authorities who promote free and open access or who

seek to constrain it; and ordinary citizens.

Such governance innovations complement the United Nations, but do not

supplant it.

Conclusion

The UN has all the scleroses that one might expect in a 70 year-old, very

human institution.

Yet, for all that, a great deal has been accomplished under the UN banner since the institution was created 70 years ago.

Those many accomplishments bring greater order, predictability and progress to global affairs,

and greater modernity, security and dignity to peoples' lives.

Times, nevertheless are changing, and they increasingly demand new combinations of multilateral, mini-lateral, regional and bilateral cooperation between governments, civil society and private and state-owned enterprise.

But the UN remains indispensable to governance and to progress.

To quote former Secretary General Kofi Annan,

The UN is not a perfect organization, but ….

It is the [only] organization that has the power to convene the whole world under one roof, to [...] discuss common issues. It is the one organization that tries to sustain the norms that allow us to live in a peaceful way... [1]

In an era of 24-hour news cycles and the rapid and repeated dissemination of bad news, it is easy to forget the progress that has been made.

Our world has been changing dramatically and largely for the better, despite the brutal realities of terrorism, the tragic loss of life in civil wars and the consequent vast refugee flows.

Thanks to the UN and innovative global governance, the great majority of people around the world are richer, healthier, longer lived, better fed, better educated, better informed, better connected and safer than they have ever been before.[2]

---

[1] Interview, Toronto Globe and Mail, September 19, 2012.
[2] See variously WHO World Health Statistics 2014, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, September 2015, IMF World Economic Outlook April 2015.